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Memorandum of Conversation

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August 20, 1961
Ambassador's Residence
Berlin, Germany

Participants

The Vice President
Ambassador Dowling
Ambassador Bohlen
General Clay

Mayor Brandt

The Vice President said that the President had received Mayor Brandt's letter and given it careful consideration, and in consultation with his closest advisers had drawn up a reply which he would now give to Mayor Brandt. He suggested that Mayor Brandt should read it and let him have his reaction either now or later.

Mayor Brandt read the letter carefully and said that he was most grateful for the courtesy of the President in the promptness of his reply. He added that he was most unhappy that his letter had been published through a leak. Ambassador Dowling said that a Frankfurt newspaper had published the text yesterday.

Mayor Brandt said that he had given a copy of his letter to Chancellor Adenauer and it was very regrettable that the letter had been published and the source of the leak was being investigated. He stated that he hoped that the President's answer would be kept confidential. He stated that he had asked in his letter for political action and he still did. He said political action was a broad term and, for example, the decision to strengthen the Berlin garrison was also political action. He said it was important to prevent further steps by the East Zone regime, saying that Ulbricht's speech on Friday had stressed high and dangerous self-confidence.

He said he had found arguments of the French and British representatives and this was a sign of East German weakness, but that this view seemed better abroad than in Berlin. In Berlin it was disadvantageous since the East regime's action was regarded as a demonstration of Communist power.

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that we should not be limited in our action by a moribund four power status. He repeated that since the split of August 13 West Berlin would only live in the closest connection with West Germany. He wished to emphasize that he was not asking for a constitutional change and that merely in practice we should be guided by the realities.

Mayor Brandt then referred to the question of United Nations action which was referred to both in his letter and the President's reply. He realized that the value of United Nations discussions was doubtful. But he felt that whatever our wishes, the General Assembly, which was to begin on September 19, would at some time or other take up the question of Berlin and Germany. He recalled that the Paris meeting of Foreign Ministers had asked the United Nations Representatives, assisted by the German observer, to make suggestions on this point. He said his idea was for the West powers to be in good position in advance to take the initiative. This should not be left to others. He felt that Western initiative was preferable in order to influence world opinion. He felt that this initiative was going to be valuable before the Belgrade Neutralists Meeting. He said that the Indian representative here had given him the impression that he could count on some Indian support, and that the Swedes, for humanitarian reasons, might be counted on. He repeated that he knew that the United Nations was a difficult problem, but that the subject would come up in any case. He said he thought it was important to pay attention to world opinion in addition to military measures which were being contemplated.

In the diplomatic field, Mayor Brandt felt that the Western delay in their protests had created a very unfavorable opinion. He had told Western Commandants that they should make a quick protest here, to be followed up speedily by one in Moscow. But this had required several days since each Commandant had to refer to his government. The government protests to Moscow had taken even more time. He felt that it would have been better to have taken up the governmental protests with the members of the Warsaw Pact as well.

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The Vice President stated that he found Mayor Brandt's remarks very pertinent. He said the President fully understood how deeply he and the people of West Berlin felt, despite the disadvantage of distance and the fact that they were of different racial origins. He said that this reflected in our decision to send additional troops into Berlin. He pointed out that democracies are always slow and that our policies are not as rapid as we would like to have them. The President considers the Berlin situation most serious and is of the opinion that it will become more serious. The President felt it most important that they all, Mayor Brandt and the authorities of West Germany, and all our allies, understand each other completely and above all, should not permit any differences to become public, but to discuss them privately and confidentially. He said that there were two things the President had done. In the first place, there was the troop reinforcement, and secondly, his trip here meant more than anything that could be said. Mayor Brandt had asked for action and that these were actions. He pointed out that the Administration had only been in power for six months and that there had been new faces in the government and that many actions had already been taken.

He referred to the increase in our military posture, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, and that some \$7 billion had been added to defense appropriations.

In regard to the United Nations matter, he had been much interested in Mayor Brandt's views but that the President's views on this subject had been set forth in his reply. He stated that we had not come to Berlin to indulge in any criticism, but to obtain a better picture of the situation. He would wish to emphasize the importance the President attached to keeping our differences to ourselves and to our working together as closely as possible.

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Mayor Brandt asked the Vice President to please tell the President that he had not meant to criticize in his letter, but that the Wednesday meeting had been extremely difficult and that to have gone to this meeting with empty hands would have been impossible for him. He said he had always realized that the Western guarantees still stand, and that he had said so. He expressed regret if his letter had been read as an expression of lack of confidence in the United States.

DP. The Vice President stated that the President understood very well the feelings of the people of West Berlin and of their leaders. He pointed out that the President had the continual task of making the American public understand the seriousness of the situation. He said, for example, that many young men were being taken away from their peaceful pursuits in order to join the armed forces, and that where this was being done it was sometimes difficult to explain to the people why there was criticism of the United States from our friends and allies. The President fully understood Mayor Brandt's desire for action rather than words and repeated the importance of our understanding each other and staying close together.

Mayor Brandt said that he would like to make one additional point. He said he understood the problems of the United States and that he had not asked for economic sanctions, but that Chancellor Adenauer had called for these. He said that the Chancellor had taken conflicting positions on the subject of negotiations. He had first said that there should be no negotiations on the threat, and then later had come out for negotiations, which gave the implication that threat was less important than blackmail. On the subject of negotiations, he had thought since the Vienna meeting between President Kennedy and Khrushchev that a larger group, i.e., a peace conference, might clarify the issues and convince a larger number of other countries. It had been said that nothing could come out of this and he felt that a larger conference might be helpful with world opinion.

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He said that for the German people the recent events might mean the end of the unification dream. It was very important to the Western powers, and especially the United States, that this matter should be approached realistically and that clarity was essential. He felt that this aspect of the matter should be kept under careful consideration.

The Vice President said that General Clay had come along at the special request of the President because he was known to be an outstanding American and a friend of Germany. General Clay said that he had little to add to what the Vice President had already said and that he could only state that the United States was with the West Germans.

Mr. Bohlen said that all he had to add was to mention the fact that in regard to taking the Berlin events to the United Nations, he would bear in mind that there was to be a special United Nations General Assembly on the question of Tunis on Monday; and that the sentiments of the Afro-Asian group on this subject would inevitably become mixed up with any consideration of the Berlin question. He recalled the great difficulties in 1948 under conditions of actual blockade and that while the possibility of the utilization of the United Nations was under constant consideration in Washington, it was the general opinion, as indicated in the President's letter, that to try to do it now would inevitably get the question of Berlin mixed up with general anti-colonial feeling because of the Tunis issue.

There was some discussion at this point of the various methods of bringing the question to the United Nations, with Mayor Brandt pointing out that in 1951 the question of Germany was brought up in the Human Rights Committee.

The meeting then broke up in order to permit the Vice President and Mayor Brandt to proceed to the greeting point for the incoming U.S. troops.

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Mr. Bohlen felt that some of the points that Mayor Amrehn had mentioned involved Allied rights, which he believed the Soviets would not interfere with at this time. The possibility of harassment of civilian traffic on the autobahn was more likely, but the counter-action for such moves seemed to be fairly clearly indicated; the GDR would be clearly guilty of a breach of agreements and it would be logical that the Federal Republic might invoke counter-measures involving the inter-zonal trade agreement (IZT). Mayor Amrehn warned that the opportunities for using the IZT as a weapon were rapidly diminishing; the GDR right now has DM 100 million credit and cannot fulfill deliveries; quotas are already exhausted. In short, the use of this counter-measure could only be as part of a package and not considered as a weapon in itself.

Mr. Bohlen, referring to the U.N., said that it would be unproductive to introduce any aspect of the Berlin problem in the U.N. right now, on the very eve of the Tunisian debate. The neutrals, i.e., Afro-Asians, were very emotional about Bizerta and one could not expect a rational reaction from them; the issue of self-determination for Berlin would get all mixed up. Nevertheless, the U.S. government had this question under continuing consideration. Mr. Bohlen added that an issue involving violation of human rights in the Soviet Zone should preferably be brought up in a broader context, since human rights were also being violated in other bloc countries in Eastern Europe. As far as the three-power status matter was concerned, Mr. Bohlen said that there was no intention of having this such a formal thing that it would undermine the basic four-power status. Mayor Amrehn suggested that three-power status was something that existed in practice but need not be proclaimed.

Mr. Bohlen reassured Mayor Amrehn that the United States would regard the introduction of a Berlin blockade, even by salami tactics, as very serious indeed. Anything that affected the Allied presence, Allied access or the access and economic ties between West Berlin and Western Germany and the free world would be the subject of a strong reaction by us. Nevertheless, Mr. Bohlen continued that it would be hard to say in advance just what we would do in every contingency. With respect to the events of last Sunday, Mr. Bohlen said that Washington expected something of this kind would happen if the refugee flow continued; of course no one was sure just when or how the East would act. We understood why the Berliners felt as they did but frankly we had been surprised that the reaction in Berlin had been so strong. Mr. Bohlen felt that in the coming months we would probably face a further consolidation of the division of the city. However, we should make a distinction between actions that stemmed from the East sector and those that involved our access to the West. Mayor Amrehn

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He said that what happened last Sunday was more than the stopping of the refugees, inhuman as that was. He said the Warsaw Pact communique gave an international status to the East German regime even before the peace treaty. The West has no voice in East Germany or in East Berlin. He said it was not enough, as some commentators had remarked, that the action had only internal Communist meaning and represented no change in the West's position. He thought that the 13th of August could play a very great role in future German developments. He did not know yet exactly what they would be. He felt that West Berlin would have to adjust to the new circumstances. Formerly, the "living bridge" had offered hope for the future. Now West Berlin would have to lead an isolated existence but it still could play a role which, however, would take some time to size up and reorient the population. He felt that Berlin should be developed into a model city -- more industry and more schools. He said there was a great deal to be done in order to avoid a loss of confidence in the future of the city. He said it would be necessary to do a number of things quite apart from the mere Allied presence to strengthen the bonds with the Federal Republic; the use of experts in the Federal Republic, tax privileges and similar matters. He mentioned that the cooperation referred to in the President's letter was much appreciated. He added that there was no time to go into details, but that this matter would be discussed with the Western Ambassadors here.

He said we would have to understand the feelings of the people of West Berlin based in some measure on the lack of communication with their friends and relatives across the sector barrier. He said it would be necessary to start from scratch and this was what he had had in mind in his letter in his reference to the three power status. He had a memorandum on this subject which he would give to Ambassador Dowling which would explain what he had in mind. He felt the four power status was now only theoretical and we should not be limited in our action in Berlin by a non-operative status. He mentioned in this connection Khrushchev's reference to the possibility of Soviet troops in West Berlin as a case in point. He went on to say that in West Berlin there had actually been a three power status since 1948, and that West Berlin had been under it since that date. What he had meant in his letter was

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in Berlin that authorized a plebiscite and that this law could be passed on very short notice; a plebiscite of this kind should be carefully timed as it could only be used once. Mr. Bohlen commented that the President did not have in mind a plebiscite for a fixed date but was thinking of something that would be useful in negotiations. For example, it might be useful if just before negotiations a plebiscite were held in Berlin in which the Berliners were asked whether they preferred the existing situation to the "Free City" proposed by the Communists.

After noting the strong feeling of confidence in the city aroused by the Vice-President's visit, Brandt said he understood that the President takes the view that no other means will be used to try to change conditions created last Sunday; that other measures were considered unproductive and might only lead to counter-measures by the other side. Mr. Bohlen agreed and said it was felt that other measures would not bring about the unsealing of the city and might indeed lead to a serious reaction by the other side; if economic counter-measures were imposed we would be stuck with them indefinitely. Mr. Bohlen went on to say that in our view this was not the real Berlin crisis; that will come only when the Russians try to interfere with the rights of the Allied powers. Therefore, Mr. Bohlen said, the President concluded that the actions that had been taken, that is, the strengthening of the garrison and the visit of the Vice-President, were sufficient at the present time. They were not only symbolic but expressed our determination to maintain our commitments. Mr. Bohlen then asked the Mayor what actions he anticipated the Soviets might take in the immediate future.

Brandt replied that he was trying to decide which of two conflicting theories was the right one: (1) now that the refugee flow had been stopped, the other side would not be in a hurry to press its demands on Berlin; (2) as a result of its successful action, the East Germans would follow up speedily with new actions. Brandt said he was more inclined to the latter point of view. He referred to the tone and content of Ulbricht's statements during the past week which sounded as though he had conquered the USA and expressed in harsh and jubilant terms his further demands with respect to Berlin. On the other hand, ^{Brandt} believed it was quite possible that the Russians would not make a direct move before negotiations took place. Ambassador Dowling said he felt we would face further moves to seal off the East-West Berlin sector border but that he doubted that Allied traffic would be touched.

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